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Statement on the Yucca Mountain Interim Storage Proposal

1 The Department of Energy's "solution" to the problem of high-level radioactive waste accumulation at 103 commercial and weapons reactors seems to me to be a premature and dangerous decision. To put air, water, soil, wildlife and people at risk from thirty years of potentially lethal shipments through 43 states, particularly when it is an "interim" solution makes no sense. And the risks don't stop at thirty years; they extend to generations far into the future.

2 I am particularly concerned about the likelihood of accidents and about the difficulties local communities will face when they occur. Large metropolitan areas would be better able to handle emergencies, but, in the event of a major disaster, their resources might not be adequate. Here in Missouri there are thirty-four hospitals that are designated trauma centers. Nine of these are level 1 centers, those with more specialized physicians, equipment, facilities and training and research programs that enable them to deal with more serious emergencies. The three that are located in the St. Louis area all have an isolated entrance, special shower rooms, drains, holding tanks and a decontamination room for victims of radioactive exposure. But those rooms have one or two beds at most. If there were more than five or six victims, there would be a problem. Practice drills seem to happen infrequently. Needless to say, rural communities would be helpless, at least immediately, in the event of a serious accident.

Administratively, at least, the state of Missouri seems to be prepared. There are 456 city and county emergency management directors. Each county is required by state statute to have an emergency manager and a written plan, and most of these are fairly consistent. On the state level, response to an accident is coordinated by SEMA, the State Emergency Management Agency. SEMA has its own "hazmat" team as do the Dept. of Transportation, the Dept. of Natural Resources, and the Dept. of Health. These can all work together in the event of a serious accident. State emergency medical ambulance service is administered through a regional system of providers, supervised in Jefferson City. State agency personnel involved in emergency management receive training every two years.

The City of St. Louis Fire Department is confident of its ability to handle any hazardous waste emergency. There is a city hazardous materials task force with 30 staff members on duty every day. A mobile laboratory, staffed with technicians, can

analyze spills. The Department is one of three or four cities in the country to have extremely sophisticated protective clothing and monitoring equipment for accidents. Interestingly, the Pope's visit last February apparently turned the city's emergency responders into one of the most advanced groups in the country for terrorist and hazardous materials preparedness.

2... The assurances I received by way of the phone calls I had time to make before this hearing are of small comfort. A serious accident involving high level radioactive materials could contaminate large areas and many people and that contamination could be of long duration and result in enormous costs. Such accidents, because of the nature of the materials, are characterized by unique levels of complication. Helpers can easily become victims. The total damage may take years to become apparent and years, if ever, to remediate. Even with a network of agencies and officials in place, something could go wrong with communication, especially when that network is complicated. Even with good training programs, staff turnover and human error are problems.

Transportation accidents are a certainty. They have already happened here. A spill of uranium "yellow cake" on Interstate 70 near the airport took place in January of 1979 and was a comedy of errors. There were conflicting reports of whether or not containers had ruptured. A friend, who called the NRC's emergency hot line late on the evening of the accident actually had to spell the word uranium for the staffperson.

2... Local communities along the transportation corridors will be depending on the DOE for help with preparedness and training. I wonder how much funding and how many resources they can really count on from a federal agency whose very life was in question not too long ago.

The St. Louis County Fire Services Radiological Emergency Response Manual, January, 1984, instructs personnel to set up three concentric zones in order to prevent the spread of radioactive contamination in an accident. The circles should be delineated by some kind of barrier, such as a rope, or if a rope is not available, an imaginary line. (p.28) The suggestion is ludicrous, and I hope the manual has been updated. That old manual, however, does contain some sound advice: "Expect the unexpected."

Why does the DOE want millions of people to have to face the "unexpected" over the next thirty years? It took us 58 years to find an interim bad solution for high level waste. I'd be willing to wait longer for a better one, if it could ever be found.

